



## Faith abuse

### Child abuse linked to faith or belief

A belief in concepts of witchcraft and spirit possession, demons or the devil acting through children or leading them astray; ritual or multi-murders, where the killing of children is believed to bring supernatural benefits, or the use of their body parts is believed to produce potent magical remedies; and use of belief in magic or witchcraft to create fear in children to make them more compliant when they are being trafficked for domestic slavery or sexual exploitation.

### Examples include:

- children have been harmed when adults think that their actions have brought bad fortune, such as telephoning a wrong number which is believed by some to allow malevolent spirits to enter the home
- witchcraft where the belief is promoted that methods of harming children will resolve the supposed problem.
- 'driving out the devil' – where the child is the victim of a 'supernatural force' and the abuse is therefore understood by perpetrators as a means of saving the child



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### Who is vulnerable?

Children from families from all religious belief; examples have been recorded for Europeans, Africans, Asians and elsewhere, as well as in Christian, Muslim, Hindu and Pagan faiths, among others.

**Not all those who believe in witchcraft or spirit possession harm children.**



Dec 2010: Kristy Bamu, (aged 15) suffered 130 injuries and was found dead in a bath following an exorcism

The conviction in the case of Kristy Bamu did a great deal to raise understanding of this type of abuse, but may also have led to a sense that it is something which only takes place in certain communities or faiths

### However . . .

Real-world factors can become the underlying factor of abuse:

- scapegoating of children to reconcile misfortune that has occurred to the family or community, such as an adult family member becoming unemployed or being in poverty. The most vulnerable people (young children, children with physical disabilities, children with special needs) within a group offer the least resistance.

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### Problems encountered when tackling faith abuse

- perpetrators may perversely believe that they are doing the right thing (saving the child)
- approach to tackling this kind of abuse must be focused and involve emotional and intellectual engagement with those individuals, families and in some cases faith or other communities whose belief underlies the harm.
- approach must not challenge people's beliefs, but where these beliefs lead to abuse an understanding must be reached that this abuse should not be tolerated

### What can you do?

Raise your concerns with the DSL Team at OSA

Contact Suffolk County Council's Customer First MASH